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SUBJECT: Renewed Clashes in Bawku Municipality

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Fighting erupted in Bawku May 4, in Ghana's Upper East Region, in a long-running ethnic dispute between the Kusasis and Mamprusis, resulting in five deaths and injuries to countless

others. There appears to be an uneasy calm after the intervention of security forces and the area is now under a 22 hour curfew. The violence arose with the shooting of a prominent Kusasi and well-known NDC activist, and it appears that the government's unwillingness to deal decisively with the long-standing Kusassi-Mamprusi rivalry will cause the conflict to fester, particularly as the election campaign intensifies. This conflict, like that in Dagbon, Wa and other traditional areas, could have negative implications for the December polls if it is not resolved definitively. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) According to a well-placed opposition political leader from the area who provided us with an account of the situation on May 7, violence began at about 7:00 PM May 4 when a group, believed to be Mamprusis, attacked worshippers at a mosque, shooting a Kusasi opinion leader (and known National Democratic Congress (NDC) activist). This was the second of such killings since March 2008.

¶3. (U) The initial intervention by security personnel was inadequate to quell the violence, and fighting continued until security was augmented. However, the improved situation did not last, as violence resumed after security personnel moved to other areas. The police presence was subsequently reinforced with army personnel from Tamale.

¶4. (U) When Kusasi residents learned of the death of the prominent Kusasi, they quickly armed and attacked local Mamprusi residents, resulting in an unaccounted number of injuries.

¶5. (U) The government reacted by imposing a 22-hour curfew (from 9:00 AM to 7:00 AM) to enable combined police/military personnel to restore some calm. The curfew affects Bawku Municipality, Zabzugu, Binduri, Pusiga, Zoosi and their environs and the ban prohibits all persons in these areas from carrying arms, ammunitions and any other offensive weapon.

¶6. (U) The death toll in this conflict is five. More than 12 houses have been burnt in Bawku since Sunday night. Security personnel state that they have confiscated five guns and ammunitions. Forty people, out of an initial seventy-two arrested, remain in police custody for further screening to determine the role they have played in the violence.

¶7. (U) Police say residents of Bawku, which has experienced sporadic ethnic violence for years, are demanding escorts to leave the town. Media reports have suggested that some residents have escaped the fighting into neighboring Togo and Burkina Faso.

¶8. (U) Interior Minister, Kwamina Bartels told the media May 6 that "the situation is pretty calm except for occasional gunshots heard in the municipality." Mr. Bartels said security forces should be able to maintain the calm, and recommended the acceleration of dialogue initiated by President Kufuor last month.

¶9. (SBU) Mamprusis are predominantly pro-New Patriotic Party (NPP) and have expected the government to resolve the chieftaincy dispute in their favor. This expectation, backed by a group of Mamprusi politicians, was staunchly exploited by politicians in the weeks preceding the 2000 presidential run-off. In the violence that erupted during the 2000 elections and soon thereafter, 26 lives were lost. Similar expectations have since December 2002 degenerated into periodic violence resulting in fatalities. Kusasis, who are

predominantly and largely pro-NDC, remain suspicious of government and its role as an honest broker. So far, government efforts to resolve this with civil society groups have been half-hearted. In addition, a porous border (and leakages from the security services' armories) has led to a stockpiling of weapons by both ethnic groups.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: Given the long-standing nature of the Bawku conflict, and the political undercurrents, it is possible that violence will escalate in Bawku and its environs in the period preceding the December elections. This reflects in part the government's inability - and perhaps unwillingness - to decisively address the issues underlying the conflict. While this long-standing conflict is likely to remain contained to the remote Upper East region, it bears careful watching as Ghana moves toward the December vote. END COMMENT.

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